

Noteworthy Talent from Norfolk . . . continued

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only recently returned from a tour covering Poland, the Czech Republic, and Amsterdam. She has also been to Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. As she got to know the members and became more active socially, she met the director of Abendmusik: Lincoln, a music program housed at First Plymouth. Abendmusik sponsors a concert series, welcoming artists and ensembles from all over the world.

Soon after, a friend called a different position to her attention. Abendmusik: Lincoln needed a secretary. The work was part-time and in an environment she felt comfortable with. She has now been there five years. And although Zuri hopes to one day perform exclusively for a living, right now she is excited to have her foot in the door and is learning more about the industry all

the time. Her primary interest is Opera and she is now working on her first CD. The tentative release date is June of 2004. It will not be Opera, but not to worry, she also loves to sing Jazz, Blues, and Cabaret, and her extensive range allows her the luxury.

Despite the mental illnesses that have shaped Zuri's life, things are looking up. She is so positive and enthusiastic about what she does and her open and sunny personality makes her very easy to chat with. Mary still calls now and again; partly to see how Zuri is doing, and partly to retain the friendship the two of them have forged. "VocRehab has always been there," Zuri commented appreciatively. Her resounding message though is evident as she says with total confidence, "Love has brought me through." □

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Noteworthy Talent from Norfolk

Zuri's unwavering spirit finds joy in a career in music.

Auschwitz: a concentration camp during World War II said to have inflicted unimaginable horrors. Today, many people tour the camp, remembering those who suffered and died there. Zuri knew all these things when she accepted the once in a lifetime opportunity to visit and sing at Auschwitz. "It was one of the hardest things I've ever done..." she said of the experience. But the music and lyrics of the song that they sang spoke to her personally, and Zuri was once again in awe of the amazing love that always seems to pull her through.

Zuri said that she felt so lost coming home to Norfolk, Nebraska after two years in an out of state hospital in the early nineties. An abusive background led to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, severe Depression, and related illnesses. Coming across Vocational Rehabilitation, she thought, "Maybe that's a starting place." She met with Mary Balaski, her VocRehab counselor, and went to work. Well, not literally. In the end she decided to return to Wesleyan University and complete her degree in music and theatre performance.

Vocational Rehabilitation helped to fund her college education and provided the counseling she needed. Zuri is extremely positive about VocRehab, saying, "I met some fantastic people who were very supportive and encouraging." She also commented that Mary never pushed her to pursue something else, despite that her ambitions were unconventional. "She was such a ray of sunshine. She absolutely and unflinchingly believed in me," Zuri said about Balaski. The testing that VocRehab did helped Zuri to know she was on the right track, reassuring her that returning to school was the right decision.

However, a degree didn't solve all of her problems. It was still tough to get out of bed in the morning, to leave the house, and not to be overwhelmed by the world around her. So for two years after college, Zuri did not pursue a career. When she decided it was time, she went to work, accepting a full time clerical position. It wasn't long before she realized that she wasn't ready for the demands of a full time career.

At about the same time, she began to sing with the First Plymouth Church choir. With them, Zuri has had the opportunity to travel Europe. She has



Zuri

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Putting Smiles On Patient's Faces

Bertrand woman reaches her goals as a CNA.

Tammy Wuestewald came to Vocational Rehabilitation with one goal: to return to work as a Certified Nursing Assistant.

That goal would be difficult to achieve, she was told, after shoulder surgery in November of 2001. Instead of turning her back on that career path, Tammy listened to her friends, who told her about Vocational Rehabilitation and the services they could offer her. Visiting the VR office helped put her back on track to the profession she loves.

"They listened to what I wanted to get back into," Tammy said. "They reach out to help you as far as they can."

Now, Tammy is working in the Elwood Care Center as a Certified Nursing Assistant, helping in the patient care for over 30 of the center's elderly residents. She has been employed there since October 2000. The road to the care center was a long one, however.

Tammy said it took her one and a half years to re-enter the workforce and that before she first got in contact with the North Platte VR office she was getting frustrated. By working with VR counselor Robin Hines she was able to work on her job skills. Tammy said that by testing her Robin was able to find what her strengths were and helped her get recertified as a Certified Nursing Assistant.

Since going back to work, Tammy's quality of life has really improved.

"Before I was really down because I couldn't do anything," she said. "After I found out I could go back it brought more spirit to me."

After her surgery, Tammy was told she could "never be a CNA". The doctor that performed the surgery said she had the capability to return to the job, but that she needed to be aware of the damage that remained to her shoulder. Tammy speaks highly of her supervisors at the Elwood care center, noting that

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Tammy Wuestewald

they are aware of her restrictions and that they do everything they can to accommodate and help her continue in her job, including the use of lifts and other equipment. Because of the nature of her job, she said many people are unaware she has had the surgery. "I have surprised a lot of people by going back to being a CNA."

"My co-workers are great because they'll ask what arm is bad and they'll work with me," she said. "They're all really great people to work with."

Now that she is seeing success in her current job, Tammy is turning her focus toward the future. She hopes to continue the kind of patient care she currently does, on a more specialized scale. Becoming an occupational therapist and working with people with disabilities is one of her goals. By helping patients recover through exercise and restorative care, Tammy hopes to continue seeing more results

of her work face-to-face.

"When you see those smiles and their faces light up you know you're doing them good," she said. "Some people say you have a gift to work in a nursing home. To me, it's not a gift; it's the residents that bring out the good in you." □

Solutions on Site

In 1998, Vocational Rehabilitation and the Assistive Technology Partnership established SOS (Solutions On Site). Today, ATP Technology Specialists (located in 5 Partnership offices) meet with consumers, Vocational Rehabilitation staff, and employers to identify cost and effective technology and work site modifications. Technology Works share the success of these solutions that are helping everyone work.

A Grand Island Jeweler's Journey to Success

Dennis Fiedler faces his disability and becomes renowned jeweler.

Dennis Fiedler's father was a jeweler and his own ambitions were similar. But the careful, intricate work that the job requires was made difficult by Osteogenesis Imperfecta, more commonly referred to as Brittle Bone Disease, which would affect his most valuable instrument: his hands. Determination on Dennis's part paid off, however; tradition would not succumb to disability.

Fiedler was attending college and aspired to be a Registered Nurse when he was first affected by another difficult condition: hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar. Eventually, he dropped out as a result of the debilitating symptoms. Back at home in Grand Island, his father, a jeweler, asked if Dennis would be interested in learning the trade. It was 1971 when Vocational Rehabilitation in Kearney first contacted him. They helped train him for a position with a local jeweler and augmented his salary. Dennis and his father later created their own business and called it C&D Repair.

This newfound career would eventually take him out of the state for more intensive training with precious gems. He went to Idaho and worked for an international diamond importer for ten years. There he worked not only during his workday but also in his free time. He became extremely devoted to the profession. Still, he called Nebraska home and came back to share his talent and hobby. Now, Fiedler has two sons and they just happen to be third generation jewelers! He is so proud of their talents and the business these days is called Fiedler and Sons Inc.

Although his future was bright and his career growing rapidly, Brittle Bone Disease made the elaborate work painful and difficult. The disease shaped his daily routine. Over the years he has broken thirty bones. To strengthen those bones, the doctor ordered weight training and plenty of exercise. "I'm deathly afraid of falling", he said. When he was a child he broke an

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Dennis Fiedler

arm while having a snowball fight. The action that caused the bone to break: throwing the snowball. This incident during his youth indicates just how incapacitating the disability is for Dennis.

Three years ago, an accident caused bones in his hands to break. When considering VocRehab, he wasn't sure he should utilize the services. Dennis felt there were others in far worse condition. Jeff Burke, his Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, finally convinced him that he was a prime candidate for VocRehab services. They worked closely with Assistive Technology Partnership. ATP's program, Solutions on Site, helped to determine just what Dennis would need, and it paid off.

Roxanne Rowley at ATP listened to Fiedler and researched the special tools available. Dennis said of Assistive Technology, "I can't believe

the research they do!" They found tools that would be comfortable to hold, that would fit his hands in such a way that he could perform his duties pain-free. The tools help him to set stones in settings, engrave, polish, and cut. Vocational Rehabilitation agreed to fund everything that he needed. Jeff Burke, of VocRehab found that working with Roxanne Rowley was both beneficial and vital. "Without ATP it would have been virtually impossible to do what we did." A grateful Dennis remarked, "They got the best tools on the market!"

VocRehab had made the career Dennis loved possible once again.

Dennis Fiedler has gained a valuable reputation. He has worked for people all over the United States. Dennis is grateful to be able to do the work that he loves and hopes simply to continue doing it. "This was his trade," Burke said, "We were just helping him maintain employment." Fiedler remarked, "I can't thank them enough for what they've done. I'm just so appreciative," □